

## Program Creates an Obesity Dialogue

### *Issue*

For the first time in more than 100 years, our children's life expectancy in this country is declining due to an increase in overweight. In South Carolina, 26 percent of low-income children between 2 and 5 years old are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. Marilyn Jenkins, the Health Manager for Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester County Head Start, and her staff notice an increase in body mass indexes (BMI) and the weight in the 1,600 2 to 5 year old children that they serve. Discussing their concern for the children's weight with their family had become a difficult and uncomfortable task.

### *Intervention*

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) Public Health Region 7 is partnering with Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester County Head Start to change the upward BMI and weight increase trend. Color Me Healthy (CMH) has been widely implemented in South Carolina. It is a program developed to increase the health of preschool children by using fun, interactive learning activities related to physical activity and healthy eating. Thanks to a DHEC Regional Cancer Grant, the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant and Region funding CMH has been supplemented with a 5<sup>+</sup>-2-1-0 program. This program focuses on families making four lifestyle choices: eating at least five servings or two and a half cups of vegetables and fruits everyday; limiting screen time to two hours or less each day; getting up and get moving for one hour of physical activity everyday and avoiding soda and sugar-sweetened drinks. The healthy choice rather than losing weight focus has made Head Start staff's dialogue with parents easier.

During this 2007 pilot year in Region 7, the following was accomplished:

- All Head Start staff received training on the basics of Childhood Obesity, Color Me Healthy and 5<sup>+</sup>-2-1-0;
- Detailed training for applicable Head Start staff on Color Me Healthy, 5<sup>+</sup>-2-1-0, collecting accurate height, weight and calculating BMIs, and lifestyle goal setting;
- Baseline and subsequent measurements on 1600 at risk 2 to 5 year olds were collected by Head Start and shared with Region 7; and
- Six Head Start Field Days reaching 1600 children who received a goody bag that included a healthy snack and a book promoting eating vegetables and fruits.

### *Impact*

Nothing states impact better than a child who passed by the DHEC Region 7 booth at the Charleston Kids Fair, spotted a flyer about eating vegetables and fruits and shouted out to her mother "5<sup>+</sup>-2-1-0." Other accomplishments included:

- All 33 Head Start sites, center and school-based, in Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties were trained in Color Me Healthy;
- 5<sup>+</sup>-2-1-0 was implemented in all Head Start Center sites exposing 1,600 2 to 5 year olds to physical activity and healthy eating messages;
- The program now has the ability to compile and generate local data which can be used for intervention and goal setting for families with children with BMIs greater than 85 percent; and
- There is potential for further partnerships to promote the 5<sup>+</sup>-2-1-0 message to other organizations in the Region, the Medical University of South Carolina's Pediatric Clinic and Lean Team and Trident United Way's Health and Vision Council, and others.

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